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Brookings Cafeteria Podcast
"Echidna Global Scholars: Four leaders in girls' education
share their stories and policy ideas"
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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. Today's episode shines a spotlight on the Echidna Global Scholars Program, a visiting fellowship hosted by the Center for Universal Education here at Brookings. The program's visiting fellows are leaders in the NGO communities of their home countries and their research and work focuses on learning opportunities and outcomes for girls in the developing world.

I'm joined today in the Brookings Podcast Network studio by Christina Kwauk, a fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program at Brookings and manager of the Echidna program. She's here to tell us more about the program and then she'll share her discussions with the current class of Echidna fellows. You'll learn more about their backgrounds who inspired them in the important work they are doing on girls' education in their countries including Pakistan, China, Peru, and Uganda. You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @policypodcasts to get the latest information about all of our shows. Now on with the show.

Christina welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria.

KWAUK: Thank you Fred.

DEWS: I was reflecting on the fact that we spoke in here just over a year ago in October 2017 about your research on how investing in girls' education can help fight climate change. A very important discussion.

KWAUK: Yes indeed.

DEWS: We're here today to talk about the Echidna Scholars Program, you recently interviewed them all. We'll get to that in a moment. But what is the Echidna Global Scholars program, and what are you hoping to accomplish with it?

KWAUK: So the Echidna Global Scholars program is a visiting fellowship that we have hosted at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings since 2012 and the fellowship aims to accomplish two primary things. The first one is to develop locally driven solutions and policies that are focused on improving girls' access to experiences in transitions within and their completion of quality education. And then the second thing is to build a global network of local girls' education leaders.

DEWS: And since 2012 how many scholars have you hosted and how many are here at any one time? What is their fellowship like when they're here?

KWAUK: So we've hosted 28 scholars since 2012 from 17 different countries. And in any one given year, we will have about 3 to 4 fellows with us in residency here at Brookings. When the scholars are here, they participate in three primary areas of activities and work. And the first one is their primary piece, which is to complete a policy-oriented research on an education issue that will have impact on girls' access to education and learning opportunities as well as their life outcomes. In this sort of area work, they tap into the different communications platforms that other fellows at Brookings typically engage in in order to get their policy recommendations out to a wide audience in general, or to policy and decision makers more specifically. So this is writing a policy report or a policy brief, blogs, videos, podcasts as well as participating in convening, so the annual Girls Education Research and Policy Symposium always features the research and policy recommendations that the scholars are producing.

The second area of work that they participate in is participating in capacity building and leadership development to strengthen key skills like strategic thinking, translational research, communication, as well as things like self-awareness, social

awareness, and education diplomacy. All sorts of skills that we think help amplify their impact on girls' education policy and practice when they leave Brookings.

And the third area is networking with other girls' education actors and stakeholders within the Beltway as well as across the East Coast here in the U.S.

DEWS: And so when the fellows do return to their home countries do you keep in touch with them have they form kind of a network?

KWAUK: Yes we do. We do try to keep in touch with them over regular email communications and that's a typical alumni kind of engagement, but we also host an alumni communing every two years in which all of the alumni come back to D.C. for leadership development programming as well as other activities, so we just got to see them all. A few weeks ago at the Girls Education Research and Policy Symposium.

DEWS: And finally how can people learn more about the Echidna Global Scholars program?

KWAUK: Well people can go online on our website, the Brookings website and see not only all of the previous Echidna Global Scholars, but also when the calls for applications open up every year. So I definitely encourage people to go there.

DEWS: Okay great. Well Christina, I'm going to hand over the mic to you and we will hear your discussions and your stories with the current visiting fellows. Thank you.

KWAUK: Great. Thank you so much.

I want to start by introducing you to the four Echidna Global Scholars whom you'll get to know in this episode by letting them introduce themselves.

NABBUYE: My name is Hawah Nabbuye. I'm deputy country director at Educate Uganda. I live in Uganda and I grew up in Kampala.

CHIN: I'm Jin Chi. I work in Beijing Normal University as Associate Professor. I also work with UNESCO international research and training center for rural education as a program specialist particularly in gender equality and education.

NAVEED: My name is Sumba Naveed. And I work with USAID in Pakistan as education specialist. I live in Islamabad which is the capital of Pakistan but I grew up in another city which is almost like six to seven hundred kilometers away from Islamabad and then that is called Bahawalpur.

MARQUEZ: My name is Eliana Villar Marquez, I am a Peruvian sociologist. I work as a gender expert in Peru for many years. I have been involved with several donors and also work as the head of UN Women. But currently I'm working as a gender expert and child poverty specialist. I live in Lima Peru and I grew up in Lima Peru also. Most of my life I lived there except for a couple of years that I did my master's degree at Duke University in North Carolina.

KWAUK: I asked each of these women to describe their early education, and to reflect on any role models they had that inspired them today. Here's Hawah Nabbuye from Uganda.

NABBUYE: I had a teacher who was Mr. George, he was wonderful. And I remember I used not to like biology, and at first I used to fail it and he called me and he was like, why are you failing biology? And like I don't like it, I can never pass Biology, he's like, No you can. And from there he made sure I sat in front of that classroom and he would make sure he would ask me questions to make sure that I participate but at the same time he encouraged me and slowly I started you know getting better on biology and by the time I finished my high school I think I was really good at biology.

My mother always pushed me to go to school and study had and particularly through my whole school. I had two teachers that were really, who supported me as well and pushed me. They acted as my mentors and by nature I looked up to them as my role models.

KWAUK: I asked Hawah what it was like growing up and going to school in Uganda.

NABBUYE: Going to school in Uganda was fun and I'm lucky to have gone to good schools with basic amenities. However looking back over time and with the work I'm doing right now I realize that our teachers used to use mainly lecturing and giving us notes at school to pass our national exams and we did cram a lot and we went through a lot of revisions to be able to pass those exams.

KWAUK: Did teachers like Mr. George inform her current research?

NABBUYE: It has to a great extent because while I had a teacher who really supported me at the same time I had a teacher who used to come to class and say you know chemistry's not for all. In fact he would come and say you know what, boys, you know, boys you should do chemistry. Because you have to, you know, be engineers and he'll be like girls you don't actually have to. So the effort I put into biology and chemistry was completely different.

KWAUK: Here’s Jin Chi on going to school as a young girl in China, and who her role models were.

CHI: I grew up in the campus and I had the opportunity to attend some best schools in China, in Beijing. I'm lucky because my parents allowed me to pursue my interests. So after I get my degree I just pursue all everything that I'd like to.

I got my degree in education in the related areas like cross-disciplinary areas because I think they are related.

My father is my role model. I also have several teachers that guided me and helped me to go through the way, all along the way. When I was a undergraduate student I [had] the opportunity to study psychology courses. I self-studied all the courses on the guidance of some teachers. They are my role model and guide me to bravely pursue this field. And later on I have the chance to have the best supervisors in China to build up my academic potential and to pursue academic career. So I really appreciate their guidance and they are my role model because later on I can pursue this field because I am [on the] shoulder of their contributions. Yeah. And since then I keep on having the guidance from the best supervisors in China and those internationally.

They build up my horizon about education, not only within education, but pursue educational problems outside beyond education to see how it has changed lives and contribute to the social development. I think it is a huge area and I feel a sense of fulfillment for what I have done so far.

KWAUK: And Sumbal Naveed, from Pakistan.

NAVEED: My schooling actually happened in different cities. Even out of country, because my father was working out of Pakistan and my mother, according culturally, had to live with somebody in the family. So initially we were living with our grandparents and perhaps when we were very, very young, not even school-going. Then we went to another city then we went to Saudi Arabia and then we came back to our grandparents and then we shifted to Bahawalpur. So it was like, studying in different cities.

I think initially we started with the private schooling which was really good. Like I

always remember starting our day in the school with play or games period. That was the best part of my schooling and I think that is one of the reasons that I still remember my school. We had a zero period and that zero period means just straightaway going into the playground and playing whatever you want to do. I mean there was no restriction that the teachers had and it's not a 10 years' time it was definitely old, but I still appreciate the school administration of that time. They perhaps would not have gone through the researches on early childhood education but they were really following it, in a good way.

KWAUK: When I asked Sumbal who encouraged her to pursue her own education, she had interesting insights around how girls may be motivated to pursue an education when they don't necessarily have role models to look up to.

NAVEED: I think there was no role model that I could look towards because there was no one in jobs. There was no one who had completed higher education or even gone out of the town to complete her studies. So I think when I think about my role models I think it was an inspiration, not a role model per se, because that inspiration first came from the difficult life that I had because it told me that how important it is to get educated, because throughout the life my family had seen some ups and downs economically and there was a kind of crunch when I was growing up and I was in university. And I could see that the only way to get the same status of my family and the respect back to them that they always have—because unfortunately our society relates respect with what you have in your pocket. So I could very easily see that there is nothing else that I can rely on expect for education and that can bring the same respect for my family back, because then everyone would be having something to really feel

proud of.

And that it was, I think, the first motivation for me to get educated because that was the only way for me. There was no other way that I could look at. So that's how it is and then, yeah, from there I thought, you know, education is important.

KWAUK: Sumbal actually had a nontraditional path of getting into the field of education, which she explained.

NAVEED: I have shared with all of you that I was a botanist and I always wanted to be a genetic engineer because that's where my love was. But again I told you that because that was the time when my family was going through an economic crunch, so they asked me to wait for at least a year till the time everything is fine and then I can go to the university that was not in the same city, in another city which is called Faisalabad.

So I said, okay I can wait but I cannot sit home because I'm not used to sitting home without doing anything. And I think right from the beginning my parents say, your brain never stops. So I keep thinking and thinking, so of course for that person it's hard to sit back home and not doing anything. And so that's why, you know, I ended up being a teacher in school.

That's where, you know, I saw that how powerful education is because it can change humans, it can make huge changes in their lives. And that's where I started getting in love with, this was my second love but now it has become my first love. So yeah. So I thought, you know, pursue it as my career and then I went up to studying in another city which is called Lahore, which is the capital of Punjab, of my province. So I went there and I studied but I continued my job as well. So it was two years. I kept studying in another city, like over the weekends, and then doing my job. So it was like

no weekend.

So yeah. But I think that paid me really back, you know, in a very good way and I'm glad that I made that decision.

KWAUK: I also spoke with Eliana Villar Marquez, a sociologist and gender expert in Peru who specializes in child poverty. We spoke about her life growing up as a young girl in Lima and what it was like going to school as a survivor of polio, and who her role models were that encouraged her to keep going with her education.

MARQUEZ: In my case because I had a disability when I was 2 years old, I was a little bit different from my siblings because I remember that many of the lessons that I missed because of the surgery were compensated because the teacher came to my home. But this was really exceptional. And in other occasions my granddad took me to school in his truck.

One of the things that my dad particularly was very clear about in general, because we are four siblings—two men and two girls—and my dad was very clear about the importance of education. And he explained that for him it was very important because he was so determined to keep on studying. He couldn't because my granddad didn't have the money to pay for that. So he wanted all his children have the education that he couldn't have.

KWAUK: Now that our four Echidna Global scholars have introduced themselves, I want to dive deeper into the education policy challenges these women are researching, and some of the solutions they are proposing to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for girls in low and middle income countries.

Through the Echidna Global Scholars Program, girls' education leaders from

around the world bring to light evidence of how education challenges manifest locally for girls, and what policymakers and other stakeholders can do to transform these.

You'll hear more from Hawah and Jin on how the educational contexts for girls in Uganda and China point to the need for more gender-sensitive pedagogies and approaches from pre-school to secondary school. And you'll hear from Sumbal on the educational challenges girls face in FATA, and from Eliana on the circumstances hindering Afro-Peruvian girls' completion of secondary school.

Recall that Hawah Nabbuye had one teacher, Mr. George, who encouraged her in biology. And then another who said that chemistry is not for all and that boys should do chemistry. These different experiences with teachers as a young girl led Hawah to focus on how education policy can empower girls in Uganda, by exploring how gender-sensitive pedagogy in Ugandan classrooms could work against the kind of bias she experienced. How could such policies be translated into practice by teachers in the classroom?

NABBUYE: "Gender sensitive pedagogy": this is the use of methods to ensure that the teacher gives both boys and girls an opportunity to engage in their learning without bias and at the same time they have the experience to discover their abilities. And for this the teacher can use different methods like group discussions, presentations to create an environment that forces or encourages both students to engage and participate in their learning actively.

KWAUK: And this approach is important for girls' education in Uganda because?

NABBUYE: Because by nature and her own biases and according to my research girls are shy according to our teachers told me girls are shy girls don't want to

participate. And if we are thinking about the quality of education in Uganda, particularly currently only 70 percent of the girls pass lower secondary and only 24 percent pass upper secondary.

And as the government is thinking about increasing the quality of education I particularly suggest that this should be one of the things to look at critically because if girls are engaged and then no longer shy to participate and actively engaging so they get to practice making decisions, they get to practice speaking up in front of groups, they get to practice critical thinking, this would help them in their passing but also it will be very important for them later in life.

KWAUK: According to Hawah, some things haven't changed since she was a girl in school.

NABBUYE: I think back then a girl was bound to experience education inequality because by nature, at that moment, if a teacher is encouraging boys to participate—which is what happened when I was in school, and it's surprising that right now when I go back to do this research it is the same thing where I see teachers encouraging boys and making sure boys are participating more than girls. Sometimes intentionally and sometimes not intentionally.

At the same time there are still some cultural expectations and gender stereotypes that are still existing regardless of the differences in areas and regions. Usually girls will be groomed for marriage; at the end of day the same thing still applies. So they haven't changed which affects how even teachers empower guards in certain schools.

KWAUK: It's helpful to hear some of the benefits of implementing a gender-

sensitive approach in the classroom, so I asked Hawah what originally convinced her that this was indeed the right strategy to further girls' education and their chances of success later in life?

Are there any real classroom examples of how using this approach has played out?

NABBUYE: So there are two examples. The first one, when I look at how gender-sensitive pedagogy can be used and the benefits and also if when it's not used the challenges that we might see.

During my research I was able to go into some classrooms and though we all agree in terms of making sure education is equal for both boys and girls—a higher level everyone agrees and even the teachers do—however when you go into the actual classrooms especially in the rural areas you'll find because the teacher is in a rush to cover notes, there are some things that they're not going to use, for example learner-centered approaches. And when they do that girls don't have any reason to participate, and that class ends without, with the majority of girls not participating with them providing answers.

And in some instances I saw where a teacher was … told a student to speak up, I'm not your husband. And for something like that it means that if I was a girl who was trained to speak up I'll never do that. But it also acts as an example for other girls because this might actually happen to them as well.

And in another class where I observed, we talked with the teacher and the teacher started working with the students in groups and encouraging the students to learn and to participate, particularly encouraging the girls to participate. And asking

them questions and the teacher would be like, think about it, I'll come back to you later so that you can answer that question.

And in those instances I saw that eventually the girls started, you know, sharing their ideas slowly because the teacher created an environment where it was okay for them to answer questions. But also the teachers, It's like if you don't have the answer and I'll think about it I'll come back. So give, give the girls the opportunity to think about the answers. And by the time the teacher came the girl did have the answer at that time. And by the end of the class there was more participation. And from there I was, I was amazed to see that two differences in the classes.

KWAUK: Overall, though, Hawah said that there has been a lot of improvement in education in Uganda. Enrollment has increased and access to education has also increased, particularly at the primary level. Yet, some challenges remain.

NABBUYE: We still have a lot of work to do especially at secondary where we are still low in terms of enrollment. But then there are some things that still persist even given the improvement. We still experience gender stereotypes in what the girls and boys are supposed to do after they leave school, even while they leave schools, even back home, the roles they get to do at home. This is routinely put into cultures and teachers are part of that culture as well.

Secondly, we get to see less girls going into universities. So if a girl doesn't pass high secondary by default you're not going to go into higher university. That means you're not going to get a university degree. That means that you are also limited in terms of the jobs you're going to get. And also it limits the income you're going to have. Currently we have more women in informal employment and more men in formal

employment and even those in formal employment earn higher than the women.

And thirdly we still see dropouts for girls as well. They leave, they don't, they don't manage to finish lower secondary; only 70 percent managed to go from lower secondary to upper secondary.

KWAUK: So, I asked Hawah how can gender-sensitive pedagogy address these challenges.

NABBUYE: So I think that gender-sensitive pedagogy isn't the only solution but it is a great part of the solution. One, if we get to encourage girls to participate in the classes, get to provide them with role models, get to engage them and get them to see what they can achieve later in life, and support them. For example if it's a girl, if a girl is bound to drop out of school to go and do something and the teacher is, you know, mentoring or supporting the girls say hey you can do it, you can go through school just like everyone else. For example so-and-so went through our school and they've been able to do A-B-C-D, I believe there will be more chances for girls to stay in school particularly in how they are taught.

KWAUK: Jin Chi, who grew up in Beijing, focuses in her research on bringing a gender perspective into early childhood teacher policy—globally but particularly in China.

To date, the international community has focused more on adolescent girls and has given less attention to the gender realities of girls and boys in early childhood. But we know that children’s personality and career aspirations learned through teacher-child interactions and childhood play develop before adolescence, which can go on to form and perpetuate stereotypical gender roles.

I asked Jin to talk a little about gender stereotypes and the importance of tackling them early on.

CHI: When I look at this topic I also think it is important to look at gender stereotypes because it has been rooted in socially, and economically, culturally. When I went talk with the girls educational leaders in China, when we work with them for years, all of them agree that gender stereotypes and cultural norms are the hardest to tackle. And when we need to sustain the impact in the cultural context, in the local context, this particular area is the most the most difficult and [has] to be the focal part to deal with. Otherwise we will not succeed.

And as I am a psychology major, I would like to explore more what would be the early intervention to look at gender stereotype, and think early childhood is had been overlooked. It is very important in terms of having the cognitive and affective formation that contribute to gender identity, and that gender identity is acquired an early childhood, in teacher and child interactions, in child's acquiring about the skills, the personalities, and future social roles. And when this builds up it's already formed before adolescence. So it is important to look at early childhood.

As I mentioned, some gender ideas [and] identity form in early childhood. Two-year-and-a-half children can label [the] sex of people. By three-year-and-a-half, children understand gender stability. And by six-years-old the study found girls tend to believe boys as smarter. And that means a gender stereotype [is] highly possible formed in early childhood.

So and also when looking at the research showing kindergarten teachers, and we found that the education process actually carried the gender stereotypes and caught

some bias. That being translated into a teachers' practices influenced children's idea about themselves and to get social support, to get peer support. So it's highly important for early childhood education to look at this issue when, when pursuing a quality education in the foundation age.

KWAUK: Jin explained why gender stereotypes are so difficult to tackle in China.

CHI: Gender stereotype overall is the hardest issues in gender and development. In the Chinese context, it has some particular phenomenon based on the one child policy. In these, in this case, let me cite one index about [the] sex ratio at birth. China has the most imbalanced sex ratio at birth in the world, and makes China rank the lowest in health and survival indicator[s] in gender gap index. So it shows that somehow the gender stereotype had been entrenched in people's mind. Just before boys and girls come to this road. The girls missing just shows the local mentality in people's mind.

Another thing is to look at girls' development after education. When girls get education, the whole society can benefit from it. But in China the gender gap has been persistent in the past 10 years at least. To look at the social, economic, health aspects, the gender aspects have not changed that much.

Also look at [the] labor market. Although many Chinese women have been working in the labor market their salary has been lower than men. The leadership there, they have the potential, but their leadership capacity have not been leveraged enough to contribute to the society. Actually everyone can benefit from that unless their potential can be equally treated and as men.

So look at the girls' education. Some gender issues have been invisible because mainly map the quantitative index that gender stereotypes existing in education process

and maybe some learning materials, but very few studies have been really investigating this issue. So many things can be done in China both in terms of enhancing the quality of education and also the gender equality in China.

KWAUK: Jin described some of the challenges with continued gender stereotyping in Chinese education, but I wanted to know what some of the strategies are for addressing this issue. What's the evidence to suggest these strategies work?

CHI: Lots of studies focus on toys that children might choose and teacher will come play a role in that. So when children, boys and girls play like, like blocks and they've got different instructions from the educator. Another case is that there are also some social roles have been carried in the content to describe a particular person and need to focus on particular kinds of work in the social area. There are also studies about when children violate the boundaries of sex roles and [the] teacher insists, using the traditional understanding about social roles, too to inform children what should be the correct pathway for them.

So actually when, when teacher be open to children's choices, children develop much better. But unfortunately many teachers have not realized that, it means that teachers have not been equipped with the knowledge and skills to really give good guidance for children to develop in this regard.

KWAUK: When Jin returns home to China, she'll have the opportunity to inform teacher policies to incorporate more of a gender perspective. What are some the specific policies to combat gender stereotypes in early childhood education?

CHI: We need to look at, one is from education and one from gender equality.

In education, teacher[s] have been the focus to improve the quality of education.

In this development, we need to look at what had been achieved in the past. China achieved gender parity in the whole country in primary, secondary, and even at the preschool, early childhood level. It is not easy because China has such a variety, and even including the poor areas and all boys and girls can have the education. In that case China had also built up the capacity to map, to monitor gender equality in China.

When talking about the quality of education, more focus on early childhood-teacher because it has been the weakest link in China's education system in the past years when China pursuing the universalizing [of] the primary and lower secondary education. In the past seven years China [has] made great achievement, amazingly rapid progress in enrolling kindergarten kids to have early childhood education. So the quality demands [are] very pressing and the teachers need training, teachers need to improve, and also the quantity, the number also needs to increase.

Also the government investment put in education has been increasing, and we think that it will increase in the next few years. But in the government planning to build up teacher quality, there is no gender perspective, especially for early childhood education. Although that has been put in the primary school and secondary school.

There is need of the policy to anchor to gender, particularly at the gender level. So, early childhood teacher policy can be an opportunity to build up these gender perspectives both at the quality level and gender level. And also when taking a look at gender equality in education in China, in the past years China also make great progress. There is an initiative to promote gender equality in primary and secondary education. That is mainly to mainstream at the teacher level and the content level and in teaching process. So it is in a very deep integration, but is not also does not include

early childhood.

There will be a next step for them, for the education when they move to the next stage we'll look at early childhood because it is an important critical education period. And as I said just now, early childhood forms many gender ideas and teachers need these kind of trainings to help them build up the skills in the teaching process.

KWAUK: As Sumbal Naveed explained earlier, she faced difficulties getting her education as a young girl in Pakistan. But this motivated her to become involved in looking at a subpopulation of young Pakistanis who face perhaps even more challenges then she did.

Sumbal conducted her research on the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, commonly known as FATA, a region that was under the Taliban in the borderlands between Pakistan and Afghanistan. She reflected on female students' experience here compared to her own.

NAVEED: When I look at the lives of these girls in such areas I feel like I was very lucky. I was very fortunate. I was blessed with so many opportunities around me. And that made me do things maybe effortlessly because things were around, it was just my own decision, my parents decision to let me go in those directions. But the girls in FATA don't even have those directions. So that's the, I think, the worst thing happening around them.

So that's why I think, when I look at their whole situation and being in USAID, we had already been planning a few projects for them that exposed me to more information about what condition these girls and this whole community is living in. And I think that was enough to empathize with the situation and given the fact that I am an educationist

I could not stop myself doing something for these girls. And that something is definitely making education possible for them because that's where the start is, because once they need access to education and then using that privilege of having them in the school we can work more on what their roles should look like in the society, which are limited to being just a mother. As I said even in my other discussions on my research. So I think, yes, education is the beginning for their lives. That's where their life starts I think.

KWAUK: Sumbal didn't live in or come from this area of Pakistan, but heard from her study's key informants about the difficult circumstances for girls there.

NAVEED: But what I can imagine is that all the girls actually are already knowing when they are born that what are their limits and their limits are mostly within [those] four walls.

So, there are those who are going to school and even beyond but really beyond grade 5 I think are the luckiest girls in that region. Because a lot of the respect that this culture has for the families and even for tribes is put on the shoulders of the girls. So that's where their life becomes really restricted and they have to be very careful because they are not getting for their own respect or their own life, because they know the burden that they have for the life and the respect of the whole tribe. Because there were instances that we read and we heard about that where just disrespecting one girl or one family ends up, you know, effecting that whole tribe. So girls are, you know, in that way having not only the responsibility of their own life and respect but, you know, the whole tribe. So that was probably not something justified being done with these girls.

So I think they are there are they are brought up with that kind of feeling. And that's why they themselves feel like their life is limited.

And then the other thing that is attached to it is marrying them at a very early age. Because there is nothing else that they can do because they are born to be a mother and to get married to somebody. So that's the only purpose a girl [has] there in that culture. So I think when she grows up she knows that “I will get married,” so maybe even the dreams that she dreams about is only about marriages. So there are no other dreams.

So the reason they need to get educated and get exposed to life outside of a typical life in that region, is important, is necessary, because that's when they know there are more dreams beyond just of being a bride, being the wife of somebody, or just producing dozens of children, because that's the only role that they know at the moment they have. And I think many of them have accepted it as a set standard for a life.

So that standard for a typical women or girls’ life needs to change. It needs to be disrupted. So there needs to come in some new light of what the rules are in a society, the broader roles in a family, in a society, as a citizen, as a community member. So for them these are all the new things.

KWAUK: Because so little is known about FATA, Sumbal’s research was focused on shedding light on the state of girls’ education there. She uncovered the barriers to girls’ access to education and looked at the current policy opportunities to tackle these challenges.

NAVEED: The new barriers that I've identified are very interesting. One of them is the lack of transportation, because generally when transportation comes in it's because

of the distance. But my point in this research is that providing the huge number of schools which are needed in this region is a long term investment. It needs time to construct all those new schools. So until the communities have all those schools available, transportation will still remain an issue, the distance will remain an issue. So to cover that distance people need transport.

So transport if addressed, I think, we can really addressed this issue of accessing schools because then more girls can go to school which are not going there because of the distance. And distance in this region is very important because this region is security sensitive. People still are worried about the security of their children, especially girls.

So, transportation is important. So, if that is done I think even if the school construction is delayed or it takes some time, still some of the girls can go to the school, many girls rather.

The other one is also interesting, and that is that, as I mentioned earlier, the role of girls is limited. So that's why there is no broader thinking of what is the use of education for girls. So the broader purpose of education for girls, or educating girls, is missing in this society. So they need some ways to know that girls can have better roles, they can have even more roles to play. And this education can really help them in playing those roles. So that actually helps them identify a broader purpose of education for girls.

KWAUK: I asked Sumbal for some examples of what those broader roles for girls might be.

NAVEED: This whole society is typically called as, like, a radicalized society. The one that had violence for a long time. And the one that could not resist back to what

happened in their society. People just came, they did what they wanted, and they all remained silent.

So, what is the role of women, girls, mothers? Even the whole society, to say no and to think about what they can do. I mean that whole scenario in this region, you know, demands for some more roles, some more thinking around what people can do.

So I cannot pinpoint and say, like, these are the roles that they should play. But in this whole scenario there are several, several things that people could have done if they were educated, if they were aware of their own roles that they could play. Maybe, you know, having some opportunities to do some jobs, some kind of work so that they were economically empowered and they were not relying on, you know, other people to come and support them. Because it happened that these extremist groups, they provided them with jobs, because the youth in that area was not having jobs. They provided health services because people did not have health services. They provide them with all the basic facilities. Why? Because they themselves are not doing it.

So imagine a society where women and men both, particularly women, were bringing up their children and they were also, you know, having some other roles to play, then definitely it would not have been that easier for outsiders to come and, you know, do anything for them. They could have said [to] them, Yes we already have these things that we are doing we have our work to do, we have our entrepreneurs, we have our jobs, we have our doctors. We don't need it. And they could really resist. But in this society where people had their own limited life, there were opportunities for others to come and sell whatever they wanted to sell.

KWAUK: Sumbal’s research is particularly significant now because it comes at a

time when the FATA region is merging with the neighboring province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and policymakers need more than ever a path forward. FATA is now known as the Newly Merged Districts of K.P.

NAVEED: So this is, I think, a great opportunity to provide some kind of data to policymakers. Because as I said earlier this is really, this was an alienated area. So no information was flowing out of this area. So I think this kind of research was important and I'm glad that it happened. So now the policymakers do have some data available.

So in terms of recommendations, I think my first recommendation is based on the same, that all the planning needs to be done based on data and this kind of data that I have now made available, some other quantitative data are available. So those definitely should be used.

And then the other thing that has come out of my research is that context is very important, because even within this region every district is different from the other. Even within one district you see a lot of variations. So one size fits all will definitely not work in this region. So the government has to be really careful about planning.

And then I also have recommendations on providing 21st century skills to girls in this region, because as I mentioned earlier we are not the ones who can dictate [to] them what their new roles should be, how their broader understanding to the education should look like. I mean we just need to provide them with the opportunity and with the environment where they can find, you know, what their other roles are other than being just a mother, which is important, I mean, that's where we start with.

But that's not it. Being a mother is excellent, it's required. But what’s beyond that?

So if we provide them with education, with more information, with the whole new world of internet and, you know, knowledge and information, I'm sure they will find their own ways of how their life should look like in that whole region. It is economically weak. It is, it is very high in poverty level. So they will find their own ways how the how they really managed so that's that. So if 21st century skills if taught to these girls will help them find their own ways. So that's my point.

And then of course bringing in more women into the decision-making positions so that women can really help the whole policymaker side to understand what kind of problems women are facing in their region. Who else can know better than the women from their own region?

And then at the end I have proposed that making only the education sector responsible to deal with all kinds of problems is probably not justified. Other sectors, for example, those which are related to human resource development, those related to workforce development, and even private sector, because private sector can help them open new schools that not only provides education but it also create some more jobs for girls. And different kinds of jobs, even teaching, management, all sorts of, and even finance. So I think the private sector also needs to join along with definitely, donors, philanthropic, diaspora. This is a region which is just starting its life as I always say. So everyone can have their own contributions in their own way.

KWAUK: From gender-sensitive pedagogy in Uganda, to a gender perspective in early childhood education in China, to the challenges of education in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, we've covered a lot of policy and geographic ground.

For our last stop, we'll return to Peru, where Eliana Villar Marquez is from and where she researches the Afro-Peruvian subpopulation, and in particular the education challenges faced by Afro-Peruvian girls, who in general have the lowest level of education in the country.

Afro-Peruvians are descended from the first enslaved Africans brought to colonial Peru by Spanish conquistadores in the 16th century. Afro-Peruvians account for about 3 percent of Peru's population today.

I asked Eliana to describe what brought her to this topic.

MARQUEZ: One of the things that really caught my attention was the fact that there was information for everything—detailed, disaggregated information about any group in the country except [for] the Afro-Peruvians.

Since we all know, I mean the people that live in Peru, that afro Peruvian population is not very big, it's really small, so we thought that maybe it wasn't that important to have specific numbers for them. But the thing is that only in the last three, four years we have specific information on their actual situation. And that was one of the reasons why I wanted to do a specific study on completion of secondary education by Afro-Peruvian girls because I wanted to know if they were facing that same kind of challenges that other girls were facing or if they have any specific problems or issues that someone, a researcher, should put the light on and try to bring some attention to these kind of issues for policymakers to look at that more carefully.

We didn't have information specific information about Afro-Peruvians because Peru being a multicultural country the thing is that ethnicity was defined only by language. So you were either a Spanish speaker or some other language, like

Quechua, speaker. So because of that Afro-Peruvians were kind of lost in the Spanish speakers. So I think that that was a really huge mistake that was done at some point. And that statistic area in my country is trying to be correct now using that methodology of self-identification.

KWAUK: So, it's just within the last three years that data on Afro-Peruvians has really surfaced. I asked Eliana to explain the implications of Afro-Peruvians being overlooked by public policy for so long, and whether there are new opportunities to address the specific circumstances of Afro-Peruvian girls.

MARQUEZ: Well, one of the things that really was pretty shocking for me was that, contrary to what most of the people may think, in some cases Afro-Peruvians are even more disadvantaged than indigenous populations. Because when you look at Latin America, specifically those that have an indigenous population, you may think that they are the most excluded or the most vulnerable. This is not always the case when you look at the situation of Afro-Peruvians.

For example, in the research that I conducted during these months I have found that there is a huge gap between women and females, for example 15-years-and older, concerning education particularly in rural areas. So for example in the case of Afro-Peruvian women 15-years-old and older they have the highest percentage of women with only primary education or less. And also it's the same for urban areas in the sense that they have much lower level of education that any other ethnicity.

I'm quite optimistic about the current context in Peru because there are some very good opportunities to try to push the Afro-Peruvian agenda in the policy discussion. For example the Peruvian state is very committed with the compliance of the

Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

So one of the things that may be done with collaboration, for example, with UN, is in the follow up mechanism and the follow up system that they have set together with the national statistic unit and Planning Institute, ____, is to make sure that we include the specific situation of Afro-Peruvians in this monitoring system along these follow up indicators.

And I think they are trying to do their best to do it and I think that with the findings and conclusions I got in my paper I could also contribute in a way to know a bit more on this on this subject.

KWAUK: Eliana's work also highlighted existing initiatives attempting to increase educational access by marginalized groups. However, many of these programs, although great, have done little to address the inequities faced by Afro-Peruvians. Eliana explained why.

MARQUEZ: Even though I have found information disaggregated by sex in some of these programs I haven't been able to find information disaggregated by ethnicity.

That is something that is kind of worrisome because I think that we should be able to know if Afro-Peruvian girls and boys are really, first of all that they know about these programs, that they are being informed by their teachers or the principal of their school, and also if they are making an effort to apply for these schools. And I think that's, for example, the importance of breaking stereotypes because if you like position myths or like Afro-Peruvian children are not very smart in general, there's a point where they are going to start believing it and internalizing this and not making an effort to have a high academic performance.

So I think that this is very important that we break these kind of stereotypes that are absolutely false or they are not based on any evidence. And to start encouraging them to apply to this kind of public programs and to also be part of the benefiting of the development of the country. And I think it's it could be fair because they are a minority. They may be overlooked sometimes but they are also part of the nation.

KWAUK: In addition to historic racial discrimination, racial stereotypes, and lack of access to information about educational opportunities, Eliana's research also highlighted how other factors inform the low completion of secondary school by Afro-Peruvian girls.

These include parents' level of education, a high tolerance of violence against children and women, and social expectations that girls bear the burden of domestic chores. We discussed some of the key actors, like the Ministries of Culture, Education, and also Women and Development, and the roles that they play and the interests they have expressed in addressing some of these barriers.

We also discussed some of the specific policy entry points that she wanted to pursue with such actors upon returning to Peru.

MARQUEZ: For example one of the things that I would like to work on when I go back home is to talk with the minister of culture and the minister of education and also the National Statistics Institute to see the possibility of having access to the disaggregation of children who are benefiting from the education programs to see if these exist or not. Probably the reason has not been processed.

But I would say that is a very important starting point because then we will know if actually Afro-Peruvians are really excluded from these programs and if so, why. We

need to wonder why is this happening and also to see if it’s not a quota at least to be more clear and explicit and transparent about how we do some small changes to make them be more interested in applying for these kind of programs. I think that the effort is worth it and I know for sure that the United Nations is interested in helping these kinds of issues.

And I would say that it's just a matter of coordination and building consensus about some specific issues. And then we will try to prioritize or to see what is feasible in the short term and what is feasible in the longer term.

KWAUK: In addition to key actors in the public sector like the National Institute of Statistics and the Planning Institute, Eliana said that Afro-Peruvian organizations are vital to instigating policy change for Afro-Peruvian girls. The private sector was also an untapped set of players.

MARQUEZ: I understand also that some entrepreneurs have shown huge interest in improving the quality of education in the country. I could say that because there is a very strong message of inclusion and nondiscrimination in general in the country. That could be also a very important way of involving them to have children that are more prepared to face the future but also that there is ethnic diversity in companies because this is how Peru is and every space in Peru should be a representation of what is happening in reality. And so far I think that this is not the case because we don't see, for example, Afro-Peruvian men or women in the parliament, is very difficult, or in high level positions in the private or even in the public sector. And I think that this is a problem itself because children need, usually, role models to follow to aspire at and use as an inspiration for them just to understand that they could become whatever they want

if they work hard and if they are using their skills and their talents.

KWAUK: I asked Eliana and the three other Echidna Global Scholars where they see themselves in girls' education in five years and the role they see themselves playing in informing system-wide change for girls in their countries.

MARQUEZ: I hope I can keep on doing this work with particularly with the Afro-Peruvian organizations and to try to build some additional evidence for them to use for advocacy purposes. I think that sometimes because there are so many problems in the country and because Afro-Peruvians have to compete with other topics in the policy agenda it may be hard to be heard.

I would like to be able to keep on producing evidence for them to use and to try to find additional evidence that is not available but that I can try to get from that from the organizations in the public sector like, for example, I assume that there is no information disaggregated by ethnicity in the programs linked to education. But as soon as I go back home I need to sit down with the National Statistics Institute and make sure that this is like that. That is not this kind of information that that has not been released or processed that way because of lack of resources, for example, because that could be easily fixed.

And the benefits could be huge because then we will know if our beliefs are certain or not. And also to do something about it. And I think that these small islands of excellence that are the high performance schools should be also reachable by other students, like by the Afro-Peruvian students, by girls particularly, and I would like to be that person among others that are capable of producing that evidence for them to use.

KWAUK: Here's Jin Chi on where she sees herself in leadership of girls'

education in the next five years.

CHI: So, I will be a leader in terms of evidence-based research to inform government policy. And also I have project [and] program management experience, and program planning experience in the international context and center of UNESCO. I can also play a role by introducing Chinese context, Chinese experiences to developing countries and also bring more dialogue and collaboration at the international level.

As I said the early childhood is a gap internationally including China and I hope to build up more international collaboration in this area to move this agenda forward.

KWAUK: And, Hawah Nabbuye in Uganda.

NABBUYE: Where do I see myself as a leader in five years? I see myself still doing research. I see myself supporting and implementing programs that increase the quality of education for both boys and girls. And this will take different forms depending on what the need is and what that challenges will be of the time.

KWAUK: Despite the scale of the efforts needed in Pakistan's FATA, Sumbal Naveed's five-year vision goes beyond access to education for girls there.

NAVEED: So I see myself improving both quality and access to girls' education. We cannot say that we are done with our job when we improve access to girls [for] girls. We can say we are done when we know what they are doing when they are in school and when they come out, how enabled they are.

So I think in five years that's probably where I would like to get. That after providing them with access to education, we make sure that they learn what is needed for them to learn at that point in time.

So planning ahead of time and definitely this is just the beginning.

When I go back and work with FATA government, because that's where my research is focused, so initially I'll work with them. But my overall plan is that if, and definitely, *inshallah*, once I succeed in making this project possible for FATA then I can really replicate to the other parts of Pakistan. So far it's kind of a pilot for me, for all the efforts to make education really high quality that can benefit girls and not just, you know, going into the school learning numbers, language, and that's it, that's a basic literacy that anyone can get from anywhere. But to me the purpose of school is to preparing girls for their future life. And that's missing.

I think you will always see me advocating for education, particularly girls' education, even until last breath I would say. So that's how I am.

And in terms of like professional leadership I think one thing that I've committed here is that bringing in what we are teaching, particularly to girls, that's important.

KWAUK: I hope you all have enjoyed hearing about the research and policy recommendations, as well as the personal stories of the 8th Cohort of Echidna Global Scholars at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings.

Hawah and Jin's research point our attention to the importance of equipping and supporting teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to provide girls with a gender-responsive learning experience, from early childhood through to adolescence and beyond. What I learned from their collective work is that we need to leverage teachers as agents of change for girls. But to do so at a systematic level, we need to tackle the harmful gender stereotypes and mindsets that teachers might be manifesting in the classroom that hold girls back.

Sumbal and Eliana's research illuminated how state actors in Pakistan and Peru

are at an important crossroads for girls' education. They can either take the helm and ensure their countries' most marginalized girls can access and complete 12 years of quality education, or they can miss what promises to be an important turn of the tide in gender equality and education globally.

As each of these scholars return to their respective countries, we look forward to seeing how the evidence and policy solutions they've brought to light while at Brookings begins to have direct impact on girls' lives.

To learn more about the Echidna Global Scholars Program, and to read the reports and blogs from the 2018 cohort or from previous cohorts, please visit the Center for Universal Education on the Brookings website at brookings.edu/universal-education.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.